# *The* CASE *of the* Poor Fiſhermen *uſing* Billinſgate *Market, Humbly Offer'd to the Conſideration of the* Lords Spiritual and Temporal, *and* Commons *in Parliament Aſſembled.*

THAT the Fiſhermen have laboured under very great Oppreſſions at *Billinſgate*, by the Lord Mayor's Officers, and the Wet-Trading Fiſhmongers, they being in a Combination againſt the poor Fiſhermen, by which, great numbers of induſtrious poor Fiſhermen and their Families, will be inevitably Ruined, if ſome ſpeedy Care be not taken, by making the Market of *Billinſgate* Free. The Officers of all ſorts do Extort great Duties from the Fiſhermen, for their bringing and ſelling Fiſh at *Billinſgate*, contrary to the Statute of 5 *Eliz. cap.* 5. which plainly ſays, *That no Toll or Duty ſhall be paid by any Subject of* England *bringing Fiſh, and Selling the ſame at any Market.* **Any Liberty, Cuſtom, Grant or Privilege whatſoever to the contrary notwithſtanding.**

Yet notwithſtanding the ſaid Statute the Officers have forced by Exaction from the poor Fiſhermen, and by Compulſion made them pay in Money and Fiſh ſometimes to the value of 14, 16 and 20 *s.* at a time for their bringing of a ſingle Freight of Fiſh to Sell at the place aforeſaid; ſome of whom refuſing to pay thoſe Exorbitant Demands and Impoſitions, have been carried before a Juſtice of Peace for the ſaid City, who hath Committed them for their refuſal of the aforeſaid Extravagant Fees; and they by reaſon of their Poverty, have been frighted into a Submiſſion and Compliance with the unreaſonable Demands of the ſaid Officers: And the Exactions or Duties aforeſaid, have been forced from them by the ſaid Officers, tho' they have not come to *Billinſgate*, but went to *Hungerford* Market, and other places.

The Fiſh-mongers in their Printed Caſe do ſet forth, that *Billinſgate* is more properly, and till of late, was only a Landing-place for Salt, Fruit, Victuals, and other Commodities, as in truth it is; which very much hinders and obſtructs the Freedom of the ſaid Market, which its hoped the Bill now depending will Remedy.

Alſo, the Fiſh-mongers ſet forth in their Printed Caſe, that there hath been a good Cuſtom uſed at *Billinſgate*, and pray that the ſame may be continued.

What they mean by this good Cuſtom they ſpeak of, We know not.

*But to ſet forth their Cuſtoms and Practices there*, take it as followeth.

The Fiſhmongers are in a Combination, inſomuch, that two Fiſhmongers ſhall Buy up Fiſh for the whole Company, and divide the ſame by Lot; by which Evil Practices the Fiſhmongers having reduced the Buyers into ſo ſmall a number, that they will have the Fiſh of the Fiſhermen at their own Price; and have commonly taken whole Freights of Fiſh from them, without agreeing upon any Price, whereby the Fiſhermen have been incapable of ſetting a Price on their own Goods; but three or four Days after the Fiſhmongers comes to the poor Fiſhermen, and pays what Price only they pleaſe; which ungodly Practices leave the Fiſhermen great Loſers, and no manner of Advantage to any but themſelves; which is altogether contrary to the Statute of *Edw.* 6. chap. 15. made againſt the Combinations of Butchers, Brewers, Bakers, Poulterers, Cooks, Coſtermongers, &c.

It is therefore Humbly Prayed, that theſe notorious Ingroſſors and common Oppreſſors may be under the ſame Reſtraint, as the aforeſaid Traders are by the ſaid Act.

For that, There cannot be a Combination of a more Evil Conſequence than this of the *Fiſh-mongers*, by their daily Practice in coming to *Billinſgate* ten or fifteen together, not to buy, but to breed Diſturbances only: For, if the poor *Fiſhermen* reſolve to Sell their *Fiſh* by Retale, then they in a Riotous manner fall to beating the *Fiſhermen's* Wives: and Servants, and throw their *Fiſh* about the Streets and in the *Thames*, and have in thoſe Riots, made divers *Fiſherwomen* Miſcarry, and endangered their Lives; and if Fighting will not do, then they ſtand before the ſaid *Fiſh*; abuſing thoſe that come to Buy, and preventing the Owners ſelling the ſame; and ſo continue till about Eight of the Clock in the Morning, which is the time of the coming of the Lord Mayor's Officers, called the Yeomen of the Water-ſide (who Confederate with the Rioters, they allowing them Money for the ſame) who then make theſe Poor People depart the Place, and Sell their Goods where, and for what they can after their Market has been ſo Obſtructed.

And for the preventing ſeveral Poor People from getting a ſmall Competency for their Families; and, to Ingroſs the whole Trade to themſelves, have agreed, to raiſe a Stock of Money for the Officers Troubles and Charges, in Proſecuting ſuch Poor Perſons by Indictment, and otherwiſe, under Pretence of Foreſtalling the Market, to their great Oppreſſion.

Inſomuch, That at a Seſſions lately held for the ſaid City, It was given in Charge to the Grand Inqueſt, to Preſent theſe notorious Offenders as a Common Agrievance to the Subjects.

*Note*, The *Fiſhmongers* Suggeſt the neceſſity of a Clauſe in the *Bill*, to ſet a new Size upon Fiſh.

It is hoped that your Honours will anſwer their Suggeſtions in no other manner than according to the Size of Fiſh already ſettled; and now remaining in the Admiralty, purſuant to a by-Law made to the *Fiſher-mens* Company.

It is Obſerved, That the Lord Mayor's Officers urge to have a Clauſe added to the Bill for a Proviſion for them; for that in Paſſing the Bill, their pretended Toll or Fees will ſink.

With Humble Submiſſion, it's true, and ſo they ought to do; not only for that they have been exceeding Extortive and Oppreſſive [as before is mentioned] but alſo for that they having no Right or Claim to any Fees; as by the Fifth of Queen *Elizabeth* may more fully appear.

It is therefore, humbly hoped, That your Honours will take no Notice of the Officers demands, for that they have Sallaries, and other conſiderable Advantages payable from the City; and for that they having been the moſt Original Inſtruments, and Encouragers of all the aforeſaid Abuſes.

*Note*, The Lord Mayor calling a *Common Council* a few Days ſince, it was propoſed to Petition the Lords againſt this Bill, and upon the Queſtion being put, carried in the *Negative*: That Court adjudging thereby, the Paſſing the ſame to be for the Benefit of the City which they Repreſent.

*Wherefore, it's moſt humbly Prayed, That what Duties ſhall be paid by the* Fiſhermen *at* Billinſgate, *may be paid to the uſe of the City only, and be diſpoſed of as the* Common Council *ſhall direct.*

# *The* Caſe *of the Poor* Fiſhermen *uſing* Billinſgate *Market.*